1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

is an infallible remedy. On the whole it seems probable that the yerba mala (*Sebastiana bilocularis?*), or yerba de flécha, or mago, or magot, yielded or formed the standard arrow-poison of the Opata and perhaps of other Indians, and that the ill-repute of the shrub survived and spread throughout Mexicanized Sonora in such frequent repetition and common belief as to affect the ideas of residents and travelers alike; but it seems equally probable that the magic-inspired brew of the Seri is entirely distinct.[1]

As suggested by widespread primitive customs, and as illustrated specifically by the arrow-charming, the warfare of the Seri is largely sortilegic, this feature being but an extension and magnification of a corresponding feature of their hunting customs. The economic object of the chase is, of course, the flesh of the quarry; but the hunt normally begins with invocatory or other fiducial ceremonies, culminates in a feast opened with oblations, and ends in the use of horns or hoofs, teeth or bones, mane or tail, as talisman-trophies—primarily pledges of fealty to the favorable potencies, only secondarily symbols of success. The observances illumine the ever-present esoteric object of the chase, which is to gain the favor or overcome the power of the beast-god represented by the animal hunted; in general, this is sought to be effected through mimetic movements, or symbolic objects, associated with that animal-kind, and the retained charm-trophy is valued as a symbol of the placation or outwitting of a particular deity. Similarly, the Seri warrior strives for the supposed deific symbols of the enemy—the scalp or headdress or arrow of the alien tribesman, the fire-breathing and echo-waking (as well as death-dealing) wand of the Caucasian; and the Papago arrows, Yaqui scalps, and white man's firearms are sought avidly, treasured as fetishes, and often carried conspicuously as badges of borrowed prowess.[2] So the Seri are never without alien insignia in the form of weapons. The day before the 1895 expedition entered their stronghold, a band of warriors and women were frightened from a freshly slaughtered cow by a party of vaqueros so suddenly that their arms were left behind—and these

[1] It should be noted that the actuality of the poisonous property ascribed to the yerba mala is to some degree questionable; the plant is the only one of southern Papaveraceæ yielding suitable material for arrow-shafts, and it is possible (if not probable) that it was consecrated to this purpose by the aboriginal Opata and protected by taboo in such wise as to become a sacred and fearsome thing. It is accordingly by no means improbable that the reputed poisonous property is but the product of superstitious association, and that the plant is really harmless—an inference supported by experiments on the part of the leader of the 1895 expedition, who swallowed the juice of stem and leaves in two or three minute but increasing doses without perceptible effect. On the other hand, it should be observed that the region is one abounding in toxic juices, and that this shrub is so luxuriant and so free from thorny armament and other protective devices of a mechanical sort as to raise the presumption that it must be protected against herbivorous animals, at least, by chemical constituents of some kind (cf. ante, p. 28).

[2] These motives on the part of the Seri were reciprocated by their tribal enemies; a Papago fetish in the form of an Apache arrowpoint, long worn by an aged warrior as a protection from Apache arrows, was among the spoil of the 1894 expedition; and a "poisoned" Seri arrowhead and foreshaft, worn by a supernumerated Papago "doctor" as a badge of invulnerability to similar missiles, was confidently shown to the 1895 expedition, but was held above price by its wearer—and this despite the fact that he had been christianized for decades, and retained no other pagan symbols.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

186 pitiful case of Fray Crisóstomo Gil, and othertimes rising explosively
648 beyond the feeble control of the untrained mind; for the impulse of enmity toward aliens is an ever-present possession—or obsession—of the tribe, and a reflection of that race-sense which is their most distinctive attribute.

726 Of open warfare and face-to-face fighting there is hardly a germ among the Seri. When themselves ambushed or surrounded, some of their stouter warriors have in a few instances faced the foe for a few minutes at a time, as is shown by the annals of Cerro Prieto; yet this accidental attitude but betokens the play of chance rather than the plan of choice. Concordantly, the folk avoid the method of warfare (so common among other Amerind tribes as to be properly considered characteristic) involving open duel between chiefs and other warriors; they seem to be devoid of that sense of fairness in fighting which finds expression in the duel; and despite the individual advantages growing out of gigantic stature, immense strength, and superior swiftness, they habitually seek to combine in numbers against panicked or baffled enemies, just as their hunters throw themselves mercilessly on surrounded quarry. Of open boldness or confident prowess no trace appears; and the body of facts seems to justify the prevailing Sonoran opinion that the warfare of the Seri is treacherous and cowardly in design, craven and cruel in execution.

Once begun, the conduct of the fray by the Seri fighters is fairly uniform; the warriors either *discharge clouds of arrows from* their coigns of vantage, or rush to brain their victims with stones, or to break their necks and limbs and crush in their chests, as in the slaughtering of quarry; and according to the tale of the occasional survivors—Señor Pascual Encinas and his son Manuel, Don Ygnacio
[115] Lozania, Don Andrés Noriega, Don Jesus Omada of Bacuachito, and Don Ramon Noriega of Pozo Noriega, are among the survivors and informants; also the sturdy Papago fighters, Mariano, Anton, Miguel, and Anton Castillo (whose sister died of dread while he was on the 1895 expedition)—the rushing warriors are transfigured with frenzy; their eyes blaze purple and green, their teeth glisten through snarling lips, their hair half rises in bristling mane, while their huge chests swell and their lithe limbs quiver in a fury sudden and blind and overpowering as that of springing puma or charging peccary. Of the successful assaults the ghastly end is rarely recorded, though whispered large in the lore of Sonora; in the unsuccessful assaults recounted by survivors the blood-frenzy burned but briefly and died swiftly as the disappointed warriors skulked silently behind rocks and shrubs, or fled across the sands with inconceivable fleetness. These details of battle precisely parallel the details of butchery of beastly quarry, as recounted by local observers and corroborated by Mashem's recitals.

266 So far as can be ascertained the parallelism between frenzied battling
727 and furious butchery in the chase affords the chief basis for the firm

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

Sonoran belief that the similarity extends one step further, and that the human victims are rent and consumed, like the beasts. There is a lamentable lack of data concerning the alleged anthropophagy of the Seri; on the one hand there is the deep-seated local opinion, generally growing stronger as the tribal territory is approached, and agreeing so well with the hunting customs, the thaumaturgic arrow-poisoning, the zoomimic handicraft, and zootheistic faith, and especially with the pervading fetish-piracy of the folk, that its validity would seem inherently probable; on the other hand, there is not only a dearth of specific positive testimony, but haciendero Encinas (best informed among Caucasians concerning Seri customs) and several of his yeomen reject the prevailing belief, while Mashém consistently repudiated the custom, both in general and in particular, and in ceremonial as well as in economic aspects, whenever and in whatever way the subject was approached during his intercourse with the 1894 expedition. On the whole, the much-mooted question of Seri cannibalism must be left open pending further inquiry, with some preponderance of evidence against the existence of the custom. 266 727

The war-frenzy of the Seri fighters is significant in its parallelism with the blood-craze of the chase, and even more so in its analogy with the warpath customs and ceremonies of most Amerind tribes and many other primitive peoples. In typical tribes the warpath custom is a most distinctive one, standing for an abnormal state of mind and an unaccustomed habit of body, perhaps to the extent of an extreme exaltation or obsession akin to intoxication, in which the ordinary ideas of justice and humanity are inhibited; among most tribes the condition is sought voluntarily and deliberately when occasion is thought to demand, and is superinduced by fasts and vigils, exciting songs and ceremonies, and related means; while among certain tribes the aid of symbolic "medicines", which may be actual intoxicants, is invoked. Thus the savage on the warpath is a different being from the same man in times of peace; viewed from his own standpoint, he is possessed of an alien and violent demon, usually that of a fantastic and furious beast-god whose rage he must symbolize and enact; viewed from the standpoint of higher culture, he is a raving and ruthless maniac whose craze is none the less complete by reason of its voluntary origin. The warpath frenzy is one of the fundamental, even if little understood, facts of primitive life, and the character of the savage tribe can not properly be weighed without appreciation of it. Now, the Seri blood-craze seems measurably distinct in two ways: in the first place, it expresses a more profound and bitter enmity toward aliens than is found among most savage tribes—i. e., it is instinctive and persistent in exceptional degree; in the second place, it is more spontaneous and explosive in its culmination when conditions favor than among tribesmen who induce the condition by elaborate preparation—i. e., it is dependent on the swift-changing hazard of warfare in exceptional 000 171 726 [196]

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

597 While the lieutenant attached no significance to the painting, the
648 procedure would seem to have been a ceremonial adoption, such as might, for example, be used in connection with a confederate clan. The description of the painting is sufficiently explicit to identify the totem with that of the Turtle clan, represented by the clanmother and the daughter of the clan at Costa Rica in 1894 (plates XVIII and XXIV); but it is noteworthy that the salutation with which the ceremony terminated, and which may be rendered "Captain-Brother of the Sharks", would seem to identify the totem with the shark rather than the turtle.[1]

The second case of adoption (if so it may be styled) was that of Señor Encinas, after his bloodiest battle, in which nearly all of the Seri warriors were left on the field. In this case there was no ceremony, or at least none remembered by the beneficiary; he was merely informed by a delegation of aged dames that thenceforth he would be regarded as a stronger and more invulnerable chief (shaman) than any member of the tribe, and hence as the tribal leader.

173 The third instance is still less definite, though it seems to be trust-
563 worthy. There is a widespread tradition throughout Sonora that in
727 the course of a brush between a band of Papago hunters and a marauding bunch of Seri warriors in the mountains southeast of Clemeguilla twenty-five or thirty years ago, a Papago maiden was captured and carried off to Tiburon; and that for some years thereafter—i. e., until the Papago had taken ample blood-vengeance—the intertribal animosity was exceptionally bitter. No wholly satisfactory basis for the traditions could be found among the Papago, though some of the silences of the old men were suggestive; nor was the tradition fully credited by Señor Encinas, despite its deep lodgment in the minds of some of his yoemanry. When Mashém was interrogated on different occasions, he merely shook his head in stolid silence; but when the device was adopted of inquiring the number of Papago children brought into the tribe through this woman he responded promptly with a snort of scorn, and followed this with the explanation that she never had children, and could not because she was an alien slave. The explanation was corroborated by clanmother Juana María and other matrons, with sundry expressions of contemptuous disapproval of the inquiry and scorn of the very idea that aliens could fructify within the tribe. Later, the ice being broken, Mashém intimated that the woman had recently died of old age and its consequences—doubtless as an outcast. On the whole, the direct testimony would seem to substantiate the tradition, and to supplement it with the short and simple annals of a spouseless and childless life (incredible of other tribes, but consistent

[1] This identification may possibly be correct, the cultivation of the totem with the turtle was shaped through unwilling and perhaps misleading responses made by Mashém to inquiries in 1894—these responses denoting a sea monster which in the beginning helped the Ancient of Pulicane to make the world by pushing from below, and which is now very good food—a description apparently fitting the turtle more closely than the other animal.

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1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

with the customs of the Seri), endured for many years and ending at last in unpitied death.

Collectively the cases seem to define a germ, rather than a mature custom, of adoption. In the first case a benefactor (by means regarded as magical) was formally inducted into the reigning family; in the second case the conquering hero (through what were again regarded as magical means) was less formally recognized and venerated, even worshiped, as an all-powerful shaman; while in the third case a representative of the doughtiest alien tribe was enslaved, probably with motives akin to those expressed in the carrying of chargeless guns, the making of imitation machetes, and other fetishistic devices. Except in the first instance there is no indication of consistent custom; but since the entire history of the tribe clearly contradicts regulated adoption of aliens (and indeed affords no other example), it must be inferred that any such custom is intratribal rather than intertribal.

MARRIAGE

The most striking and significant social facts discovered among the Seri relate to marriage customs.

As noted repeatedly elsewhere, the tribal population is preponderantly feminine, so that polygyny naturally prevails; the number of wives reaches three or possibly four, averaging about two, though the younger warriors commonly have but one, and there are always a number of spouseless (widowed) dames but no single men of marriageable age. So far as could be ascertained, no special formalities attend the taking of supernumerary wives, who are usually widowed sisters of the firstspouse; it seems to be practically a family affair, governed by considerations of convenience rather than established regulations—an irregularity combining with other facts to suggest that polygyny is incidental, and perhaps of comparatively recent origin.

The primary mating of the Seri is attended by observances so elaborate as to show that marriage is one of the profoundest sacraments of the tribe, penetrating the innermost recesses of tribal thought, and interwoven with the essential fibers of tribal existence. Few if any other peoples devote such anxious care to their mating as do the Seri;[1] and among no other known tribe or folk is the moral aspect of conjugal union so rigorously guarded by collective action and individual devotion.

The initial movement toward formal marriage seems to be somewhat indefinite (or perhaps, rather, spontaneous); according to Mashém it may be made either by the prospective groom or else by his father, though not directly by the maiden or her kinswomen. In any event the prerequisites for the union are provisionally determined in the suitor's family; these relate to the suitability of age, the propriety of

[1] Perhaps the closest parallel in this respect is that found in the elaborate marriage regulations prevailing among the Australian aborigines, as described by Spencer and Gillen, Walter E. Roth, and other modern observers.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

789 Some shamans display their ability to hold live coals in their mouth.

Taboos

[88] 784 At first menstruation, the girl eats nothing (!) for 8 days, only drinking water. For 4 nights a *fiesta* is held for her, men and women dancing in a circle, anti-sunwise. She is outside the ring. Her head is not covered. San-pit roasting was unknown to the informant.

[841] At menstruation a woman drinks hot water. She may cook for others. She may not eat deer meat.

[844] After childbirth, both husband and wife eat only *atole* (gruel) and water, he for 4, she for 8 days. She may not work at all, he only a little, such as getting wood, "hunting" as necessary, etc.

[861] There is no puberty ceremony for boys. Nothing is said to be known of any rule forbidding a boy to eat of the first game killed [224] by him.

[833] Continence before hunting deer was not observed. Nor was there any special treatment or respect due the deer carcass. It is said that deer meat could not be left behind unless there was too much, but this is probably a statement of practise rather than a taboo.

Dances

535 Besides the girl's puberty dance, the Seri also had a scalp dance. Only the frontal piece of the scalp was used. This was hung on a [727] pole. Men (armed) and women danced together around it. If the scalp fell down, all would die.

Dances seen were solo on a plank laid over a shallow pit. Several singers sat by, beating or rattling anything convenient. Each song and dance lasted scarcely three minutes. The tempo is fast. The step is a quick double shuffle with alternate feet. In one type, the dancer held to a stick with one hand, his body and hanging arm remaining as motionless as possible. Another type was without the stick, the dancer holding a gourd rattle and keeping his body bent forward somewhat.

534 Rattles are of gourds, e'Xēc, on a stick, or of cocoons, Xekakë'ntta. Deer-hoof rattles were denied. The cocoons are on 171 a band worn below the knee. The Yaqui-Mayo wear such knee-bands of cocoons; and sometimes of deer-hoofs. The Gila Pima also know the cocoon band.

Various Religious Items

276 Datura (toloache, jimsonweed) does not appear to have been used. Even the plant seems unknown, although it is said to occur in the Seri range.

778 789 Rain making seems to be by amulet rather than by direct shamanistic power. For instance, Antonio Herrera wears a small object

648 726 [161] The Encinas war reduced the tribe to some 350 people, and temporarily discouraged their bloodthirsty raids. By 1893, however, new killings were being reported. In one instance the Seri Chief, Juan Tomas (Fig. 14), watched as the men of a large rancho left for a rodeo and then, worming up through the brush, led his warriors into the buildings and with clubs and arrows massacred every woman and child within. Two Yaqui women who had managed to escape into the brush watched as the warriors seized the infants by their feet and dashed their brains out against a large rock near the corral. [727]

In 1904 a number of wilder Seri, led by several Yaquis, went on the warpath and killed every soul in a Papago village. The war with the Papagos that ensued aroused the Governor of Sonora into action. Nearly 250 armed men were sent out to kill or capture the Yaqui leaders and to administer a severe lesson to the Seris. The desert water holes were all placed under guard until the Seri chief, Juan Tomas, was forced to surrender for his thirsting tribesmen. Peace was conditional on the delivery of the Yaqui leaders with their hands tied together. Two days later a couple of gaunt, wild-looking Seri women, clothed in rags and with painted faces, walked into the camp to keep the conditions of the peace as they had understood them. They carried a palanca between them from which were suspended bundles of severed hands of the Yaquis who had been clubbed to death as they slept.

114 648 Twenty years after the delivery of the Yaqui hands (1922) the senior author, under arrangement with the Museum of the American Indian in New York, carried out his first expedition into the heart of Seriland. Although still intolerant of aliens and at times dangerous if aggravated, their depredations had been reduced to the occasional killing of a stray cow. The Seris had come to live a comparatively peaceful life under the supervision of Roberto Thomson of Hermosillo. It was through his efforts that the Seris were saved from complete extermination by the vaqueros of Sonora, and after having treated them for many years as a friend and adviser, he had made it feasible for a visitor to enter

[p. 263(A)]

175 if they were as hungry then as they are today, they would not stop to
648 spike a man up preparatory to serving him. Their only tools then were
266 rocks to use as hammers and hoop iron for knives, and these are in
114 universal use today.
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There is no doubt that the men were killed, but I think these mining men purposely exaggerated their findings, if any.

648 There is no doubt that the Seris were brave fighters, treacherous
721 murderers, sparing neither men, women or children on their raids,
727 killing ruthlessly. But there is one charge which cannot be brought against them, which cannot be said of many tribes north of the border. So far as I could find out, they never tortured nor scalped.

648 The Seris never took prisoners and they never inter-married with
721 other tribes, so their strain is pure.

727 There was one exception. Sixty or seventy years ago, the Seri
563 Chief Coyote Iguana and his band of warriors held up the stage between Hermosillo and Guaymas, and killed all except a handsome Spanish girl of the better class. This girl, Coyote Iguana made his wife and by her raised a family. One granddaughter still survived in 1924, and while more attractive than the general run of Seri, her complexion was fully as dark.

The Seris, Ishmaelites among the native tribes of Mexico---the most fascinating Indians in North America!

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123 *Reception Committee, Tiburon Island - 1938*

115 On the twenty-fifth of April, nineteen twenty-two, I engaged the services of Roberto Thompson, who with his father and grandfather

[text continues on p. 149]

five-gallon cans full. They were fastened one each end of a *palanca*, 123
or shoulder pole, and thus brought to camp. If anyone thinks this is
easy they should try it over rocky, uneven, sandy, stony ground,
dodging thorny vegetation at every step.

The colors of the mountains were mostly red of volcanic character, [133]
with great streaks of yellow and pink, deeply cut with side canyons
and sharp ridges, all similar to other desert ranges.

The men caught a few crabs and gathered clams in the afternoon,
which helped out our larder. One of them told about his wife being
shot. He said they had a big fiesta and during the drunk, a Seri shot
at his head. He happened to be stooping alongside his wife and the
bullet buried itself in his wife's thigh. We could feel it through
her clothes.

A good many years ago when stages ran between Nogales and Guaymas, 648
the Seris held up the stage, killed the men and captured one Mexican 727
girl. She was brought here and made the wife of one of the chiefs, 563
Coyote Iguana, and she bore children. Some years later her brothers
came here to induce her to return, but she refused, saying that she
was ashamed to go back and she had children here. About fifteen years
ago in a battle with the Papagos, two of her sons were killed.

The Papagos have taken toll of many Seris, these hunted Indians 648
who are such fascinating and ingenious companions, whether they are
harpooning turtle or packing water through the thorny wastes.

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Seris making fire (with fire drill) - Island of Tiburon

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Band V

It was stated above that this band fought with Band II and 628
then with Band I. Since Band V was likely killing cattle, they 648
also may have been harassed by soldiers. Eventually Band V [425]
abandoned its territory near Punta Tepopa and headed south [131]
along the coast to a camp near present-day Bahia Kino. From
this camp the entire group disappeared and was never seen again [173]
by members of the other bands. The Seri of today believe that
Band V either traveled inland or was destroyed by a non-Seri
force.

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Band II

These people were rustlers and marauders. Government inter- 648
vention in the situation was inevitable. The Seri recount the 726
following final encounter between this group and the government
forces.

The entire remaining membership of Band II was hiding out in a nearly inaccessible swamp thicket at Bahia Kino. Knowing that an armed force of soldiers and ranchers was searching for them, the people left their camp to seek safety elsewhere. Almost immediately they were attacked by the superior armed force which proceeded to wipe out the whole group. A youth who had avoided capture is said to have reported the affair to the Seri on Tiburon Island. This event may have occurred during the Encinas [115]
Wars fought from 1855 to 1865.

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Band VI

The members of this band on San Esteban Island were little 648
interested in the mainland and did not participate in the raids on 727
man and livestock there. Nevertheless, they were to share in the [721]
severe punishment meted out to the bands guilty of multitudinous depredations.

Sometime after the massacre of Band II, a ship arrived at San Esteban, and many of the people were induced to go aboard. The rest of the inhabitants followed the ship to a camp on the eastern side of Tiburon Island where they were to receive gifts. As the people congregated, they were herded into a stone corral. Apparently, some of the San Esteban men were killed at this time. The rest of them, along with the women and children, were taken to Santa Rosa point on the mainland. Here, the Seri say, more of the men were killed. The remaining men were strung together by wire and led away, never to return.

The San Esteban women and children, along with some Tiburon Island women and children (of Band III), were taken in

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the vessel to Guaymas. With the aid of a group of Yaqui, some of these women were said to have been permitted to go to Hermosillo and eventually to return to their home on Tiburon. Others of their group are said to have remained near Guaymas. The women who returned to Tiburon reported that the San Esteban women and children were put aboard another ship which sailed southward.

BANDS I, III, AND IV

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As opposition from the Papago and government forces increased, the members of Band I were forced to seek refuge on Tiburon Island. The mainland members of Band III (subdivisions 11 and 12) were also forced, especially during the Encinas Wars, to flee to Tiburon. There the combined forces of Bands I, III, and IV sought to cope with the military expeditions sent out through the years to exterminate them. Tiburon Island is an adverse battlefield for the uninitiated; some expeditions were turned back due to lack of potable water or because of failure to make contact with the enemy in the mountainous terrain. Some expeditions did encounter the Seri, however, and many natives were either killed or captured.

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Through the years, then, these military encounters, along with smallpox and measles epidemics, were responsible for reducing the Seri tribe to a small remnant. The band and clan systems lost their functional relevance as the people continued to live together for mutual protection. Shortly after the turn of the century, the expeditions and raids had practically ceased.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF BANDS TODAY

With the dissolution of the band system, the rule of descent shifted from patrilineal to bilateral, and the rule of residence shifted from patrilocal to neolocal.

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Although the substance of the band system is no longer a reality, the concept of land ownership still remains. A young Seri of today may choose to be associated with either the *i?iziiting* of his father or that of his mother. He is said to inherit part ownership of the area. It is recalled by one informant that in former times ownership of a mountain was especially important. Sometimes ownership of a mountain was included as part payment for a bride. Thus a person might 'own' a mountain in a subdivision other than his own.

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A custom exists even today whereby a person names his dog after a mountain or other geographical point located in his subdivision. Although the person may re-use the name, each dog so named must be of the same sex as the first.